

ATTIC IN WHICH FIRE APPEARS TO HAVE STARTED:

This attic was intended to be used as a Dormitory on the girls' side, but does not appear ever to have been used as such.

The corresponding attic room on the boys' side was used for some time as a dormitory.

The Principal states that the attic on the girls' side was used to store clothes and extra bedding. He denies that cleaning materials were kept there

The Principal states that the main flues two, one being from the kitchen I understand, with two ventilation flues, one being from the kitchen, passed through this attic, and that there was a radiator in the ventilation flue, the latter in some way covered with beaver boarding or some such material. He thinks that dust in the ventilating flue may have become ignited with sparks from the kitchen. This appears to me to be just a wild guess, but I shall make further investigation. The ventilation flues opened on each floor. I rather wonder if burning paper could have been placed in one of these on a lower floor, and I shall investigate this.

The above mentioned smoke and ventilation flues were some six feet from the door where the fire was first seen.

PROGRESS OF FIRE:

The fire appears to have spread quickly through the attics under the roof. The action of the Principal in opening the door of the attic on the girls' side when he discovered that room to be on fire of course increased the draft and spread the fire.

The school burned from the top downwards and took some hours to do so according to the Principal's statements. He is the only member of the staff that I have seen so far, and it is very clear to me that the Reverend Gentleman completely lost his head.

NOTIFICATION OF FIRE TO INDIAN AGENT:

It would not appear that the Principal telephoned to the Indian Agent.

Mr. Indian Agent Ashbridge informs me that the first he heard of the fire was when the B.C. Police informed him by telephone at about Noon on the 21st FOUR HOURS AFTER THE OUTBREAK and when the school had been destroyed.

ACTUAL FIGHTING OF FIRE:

The Alberni City Fire Department arrived shortly after the outbreak, within perhaps the first half hour. No doubt the alarm to the Central Telephone Exchange caused the ringing of the town bell as the fire alarm. Some bell was rung.

Two lines of hose were taken up the iron fire escapes and water thrown on the fire.

Reference to my reports on this school will show that the pressure in normal times is only sufficient to throw water from one line of hose to the roof from the ground, but not over the roof. With two lines the water would not reach the roof, but in any case the hose were taken up the fire escapes.

The pressure fell as the fire was fought, and it is doubtful if there was sufficient water from the City supply.

The Alberni Pacific Lumber Co. fire pump was brought to the scene of the fire and an attempt made to draw water from the river. Time was wasted with more or less frozen hose lines and the fire pump would not function for some half hour through some defect, I am informed.

ACTIONS OF STAFF AND SOME OF THE PUPILS DURING FIRE:

It would appear that when the children first evacuated the building they just dispersed, and little attempt was made to preserve discipline. This will be investigated.

Some of the staff and some of the boys carried articles out of the building. The girls took a blanket each the Principal informs me, though how they got these I have still to discover. The boys do not appear to have taken blankets with them. Some furniture was removed INCLUDING A PIANO. The Principal states that classroom material and desks were not saved from the main building.

Indians helped to save articles, and the Indian Agent is issuing a Search Warrant as a result, as it is believed that articles were just stolen by the helpers.

The teachers would appear to have lost most of their clothes and belongings, and the children to have little but what they were wearing at the time.

In general from the little information in my possession so far it would appear that all the usual foolish mistakes were made and the wrong articles saved, including musical instruments, while children's clothes and blankets except on the girls' side were lost. I am informed two Singer Sewing Machines and the Principal's papers and records were saved.

BUILDINGS SAVED:

The Primary Classroom and the cottage at one time occupied by the Farm Instructor were not burned. Some boys are being housed in the former and some of the staff and girls are with the Principal's family in the latter.

The desks and material in the Primary Classroom were of course saved.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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ACTIONS TAKEN BY INDIAN AGENT:

Mr. Indian Agent Ashbridge will render his own report; but I should like to say that when I arrived in Port Alberni he had the situation well in hand.

I shall remain for a few days to render Mr Ashbridge any help in my power, and to carry out any investigation which the Indian Commissioner may wish, but in the absence of definite instructions to the contrary I propose to return to Victoria at the end of the week or not later than February 28th.

In addition to informing the Assistant Indian Commissioner in Victoria by telephone of the fire by 2 P.M. on the 21st Mr Ashbridge wired to the Indian Affairs Branch in Ottawa this morning as soon as the telegraph office was open. Mr Ashbridge also wired to the Principal of the Ahousaht Indian Residential School to-day and learned that the Principal, Mr A.E.Caldwell could accommodate up to twenty five children if he were give some extra beds and bedding.

MOVEMENTS OF CHILDREN SINCE FIRE:

At the time of my last inspection on December 10th 1936 there were 70 boys and 53 girls in the Alberni Indian Residential School.

Since the fire yesterday morning some 45 children from the local Indian Reserves have gone home to their parents. A number of children from more distant places are staying with relatives or friends on the local Reserves. Some 50 or more children have gone home to outside points with their parents in their own boats.

There remain to-night some twenty to thirty children whose parents have not come for them and who in fact for the most part live in different parts of the Cowichan Agency. Mr Indian Agent Ashbridge is arrangements with Mr Indian Agent Graham to move the remaining children to Nanaimo with a suitable escort. From Nanaimo it is hoped that Mr Graham will be able to arrange the movements of children to their own homes or to those of friends in one or two special cases.

Mr Indian Agent Ashbridge and I are agreed that it is necessary to get the few children left on the school property home as soon as possible. Many of the children are only lately recovering from illness, and there is no proper accommodation now at the school for these children.

There is no need for the movement of these children to other Indian Residential Schools at the present time. Should such cases arise from special conditions no doubt the Indian Agents will communicate with the Department. I had thought that it would be necessary to move some at least of the children to Coqualeetza and to Ahousaht, but such children as will in the end have to be sent there are being looked after for the present in the homes of friends or relatives, if not in fact at home.

There are some 33 head of cattle on the farm attached to the school. A recommendation as to their disposal will be made in my next report. In the mean time there is a Farm Instructor to look after their needs.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS:

There are three boys attending the Alberni District High School. These boys are living on the local Indian Reserve and are continuing to attend the District High School under instructions from Mr. Pitts.

RECENT DEATHS OF PUPILS:

Mr Ashbridge has brought to my notice the fact that on or about the 14th of the present month three girl pupils of this school died in hospital.

They all died from T.B.Meningitis I am informed. The girls were:-

MARY BOB Duncan  
BERTHA FRED Alberni  
VIOLET McKAY Ucluelet

I also understand that some boys have been giving trouble at the school, but I have not had time to inquire into this yet.

CAUSE OF FIRE:

I wish to say at once that I am not as yet satisfied that the cause of the fire was accidental. There are features that lead me to think that this fire might possibly have been caused by a pupil.

WILLIAM and LOUE BOB Brothers of and GERTIE BOB Sister of the deceased Mary Bob should be I think investigated. The other dead children appear to have been without brothers or sisters at the school.

The previous school here was burned on the 3rd of June 1917.

NEW SCHOOL:

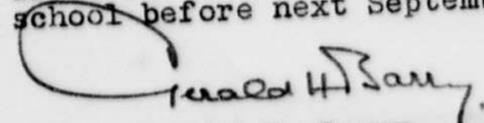
The Reverend Principal has suggested to me that the right course to follow would be for the Indian Affairs Branch to build a new Residential School to care for the children lately at the Alberni Residential School, and to absorb those now at Ahousaht, and the Ucluelet Day School.

I would most earnestly and with the greatest respect submit that great caution be taken in making any promise to the United Church of Canada with regard to the rebuilding of this school.

I do not believe that the Alberni Indian Residential School is wanted as such, or that the expense in per capita grants here is justified. The Principal informed me to-night that he could not suggest any child who should go at once to another Residential School on the grounds of having poor home conditions. If this is so it is indeed hard to justify the presence of the children in any Residential School.

I do consider that a large Indian Day School should be located on one of the Indian Reserves near Alberni and I would strongly recommend that, if not entirely too late, the sum of at least \$5,000.00 be set aside in the Supplementary Estimates for the erection of such a school before next September.

Port Alberni, B.C.  
February 23, 1937.

  
Gerald H. Barry  
Inspector of Indian Schools, B.C.

159-1-5.

Ottawa, March 2, 1937.

Dear Sir:

I desire to acknowledge, with thanks, receipt of your letter of the 24th ultimo, enclosing report of Inspector Barry with reference to the fire which destroyed the Alberni Indian Residential School on the 21st ultimo.

Yours truly,

*R. A. Hoey*  
R. A. Hoey,  
Supt. of Welfare & Training.

*D. M. MacKay*  
D. M. MacKay, Esq.,  
Indian Commissioner,  
Victoria, B.C.

*2 Letters*

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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159-1-5.

Ottawa, March 2, 1937.

Dear Sir:

I desire to acknowledge, with thanks, receipt of your letter of the 23rd ultimo, reporting on the fire which destroyed the Alberni Indian Residential School on the 21st ultimo.

Yours truly,

*R. A. Hoey*  
R. A. Hoey,  
Supt. of Welfare & Training.

P. B. Ashbridge, Esq.,  
Indian Agent,  
Port Alberni, B.C.

*PBA*

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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159-1-5



DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
CANADA

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE  
P. O. BOX 10

VICTORIA, B.C., February 24, 1937.

IN YOUR REPLY REFER TO  
No. 15/15/48129  
ALSO TO DATE OF THIS LETTER

Dear Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith letter of the 23rd instant received from Capt. G.H. Barry, Inspector of Indian Schools, B.C., covering his report on the destruction by fire of the Alberni Indian Residential School, West Coast Agency, B.C.

In the absence of the Commissioner on the mainland the enclosed report is forwarded without comment to the Department.

Your obedient servant,

C. C. Perry.  
For D. M. MacKay.  
Indian Commissioner for B.C.

Encl  
AC

The Secretary,  
Department of Indian Affairs,  
Ottawa, Ont.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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Dr. Inc. Paul  
Vancouver  
Province  
22/2/37

File 159-1-5

# VANCO

VANCOUV

## FIRE DESTROYS \$75,000 ISLAND INDIAN SCHOOL

150 School Children  
Escape in Sunday  
Morning Blaze.

### FIREMEN HELD UP

(Special to The Daily Province.)  
ALBERNI, B. C., Feb. 22.—Grim  
stone walls of the lower floor and  
a gaunt main chimney are all that  
are left of the \$75,000 Indian resi-  
dential school at Alberni.

The building was completely de-  
stroyed by fire at 8 o'clock Sunday  
morning. Between the foundation  
walls are piled charred timbers and  
the debris of every description  
from the upper storeys of the block.

The alarm was given by a resi-  
dent teacher who discovered smoke  
coming from the attic above. For-  
tunately practically all of the one  
hundred and fifty odd students  
were at breakfast and so able to  
make their escape immediately.

### ROADS IMPEDE TRUCKS.

The alarm was put in for the  
Alberni fire department which  
responded immediately but the  
three-mile run under slush road  
conditions gave the fire ample time  
to progress.

The school was protected by  
hydrants of the one and one-half  
inch size and the meagre water  
supply was insufficient to cope with  
the flames which had gained a  
strong hold in the attic, which ran  
the whole length of the building.

First thought of F. E. Pitts and  
his teaching staff was the safe re-  
moval of the students. Then, with  
the fire crashing down first through  
one floor then another, the firemen  
were driven from the building with  
opportunity to save little in the  
way of furniture.

### LAUNDRY LAST.

The laundry part of the four-  
storey structure was the last to fall  
a prey to the flames and quantities  
of clothing was saved from there.

Shortly after arrival of the Al-  
berni brigade, a second call put  
into Port Alberni and their depart-  
ment responded with one truck.  
Small hose was also supplied by the  
Alberni Pacific Lumber mills, the  
Bloedel, Stewart & Welch mill and  
the forestry department, which  
sent along a portable pumper, but  
this material arrived too late to be  
of service.

The big building was erected in  
1920, after a fire which had de-  
stroyed the former school.

Fronts Star  
22/2/37

## INFLUENZA HITS INDIANS IN ALL PARTS OF CANADA

Traders, Police, Doctors  
Aeroplanes Help—Mor-  
tality Rate Low

### TRAPPING IS LEAN

By R. W. LIPSETT

Ottawa, Feb. 16.—The Indian af-  
fairs department to-day confirmed  
reports that influenza continues  
epidemic among Indians in all parts  
of the Dominion. It was officially  
stated that the mortality rate has  
been comparatively low, however.

The number of known cases of  
pneumonia and scarlet fever is  
small and the recoveries proportion-  
ately high. There have been many  
cases of measles, but almost all re-  
ported have been mild in type.

The department said it was be-  
lieved the peak of the epidemic had  
been passed. It was stressed that  
the epidemic this winter had swept  
the Indian population from one end  
of the Dominion to the other.

### 400 Children Ill Special to The Star

Kenora, Feb. 16.—More than 400  
Indian school children and hundreds  
of other Indians have been affected  
by an epidemic of sickness which  
has spread through the Indian popu-  
lation of 2,700 in Kenora district  
this winter. Most of the sickness  
has been influenza, but there have  
been many cases of measles and  
scarlet fever.

Desperate efforts of Frank Ed-  
wards, Indian agent, and the  
M.O.H.'s of the district, Dr. O. Gor-  
man and Dr. Mitchell of Sioux Look-  
out and Dr. A. D. Ferguson of  
Kenora, who have depended much

upon air companies to get to the  
scene of reported outbreaks in  
haste, have prevented the epidemic  
developing into a serious pneumonia  
outbreak.

Although mild, the epidemic is,  
nevertheless, making conditions ex-  
ceedingly difficult for the Indians,  
who have not yet developed the re-  
sistance of the White against such  
sickness. In addition, the trapping  
season has been very lean and some  
may find themselves facing a food  
shortage. No deaths have been re-  
ported.

Word of outbreaks has been  
brought in by Hudson's Bay Co.  
traders or police. The Indian agent  
has obtained a doctor when neces-  
sary, using aeroplanes to fly medical  
help or medicine to the scene.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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Form 6102, replacing Form 2A-T.W.

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Day Letter	<input type="checkbox"/>
Night Mes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Night Letter	<input type="checkbox"/>

Patrons should mark an X opposite the class of service desired; OTHERWISE THE MESSAGE WILL BE TRANSMITTED AS A FULL-RATE TELEGRAM

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W. G. BARBER, GENERAL MANAGER

RECEIVER'S NO.	TIME FILED	CHECK

Send the following message, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to

Ottawa, Ont., March 3rd, 1937.

P. B. Ashbridge, Esq.,  
Indian Agent,  
Port Alberni, B. C.

EXPEND ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS FOR PURPOSE MENTIONED

YOUR TELEGRAM

T. R. L. MacInnes.

*TKM*  
Chg. I.A. Branch,  
Dept. M. & R.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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Night Letter	NL

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C.N.T. 6296  
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D. E. GALLOWAY, ASSISTANT VICE-PRESIDENT, TORONTO, ONT.

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PORTALBERNI BC 2 350P

SECRETARY

INDIAN BRANCH DEPT MINES AND RESOURCES OTTAWA ONT

REQUEST AUTHORITY TO EXPEND UP TO ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS TO

RELIEVE DISTRESSED SCHOOL CHILDREN REQUIREMENTS CLOTHES AND SHOES

P B ASHBRIDGE.



Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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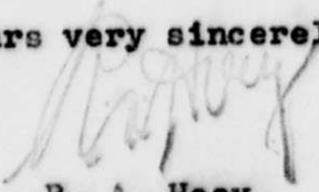
Ottawa, March 3, 1937.

Dear Dr. Cochrane:

I am enclosing, for your information, copy of a report on the fire at the Alberni Residential School, signed by Mr. P. B. Ashbridge, Indian Agent.

I was glad to learn that it is Dr. Dorey's intention to visit Ottawa on his way to the Maritime Provinces, next week. I shall be glad to discuss with him at that time the educational problem confronting us, as a result of the fire. Any hour that Dr. Dorey may find convenient will be suitable for me.

Yours very sincerely,

  
R. A. Hoey,  
Supt. of Welfare & Training.

 Encl.

Rev. Robt. B. Cochrane, D.D.,  
Secretary, Board of Home Missions,  
United Church of Canada,  
299 Queen Street West,  
Toronto, Ont.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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REV. D. C. MACGREGOR, D.D.  
CHAIRMAN

**Board of Home Missions**  
The United Church of Canada

299 QUEEN ST. WEST  
TORONTO 2, ONTARIO

REV. ROBERT B. COCHRANE, D.D.  
SECRETARY

REV. GEORGE DOREY, D.D.  
ASSOCIATE SECRETARY

REV. BRUCE G. GRAY  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Mr. R. A. Hoey,  
Supt. of Welfare and Training,  
Indian Affairs Branch,  
O t t a w a, Ontario.

March 2nd,  
1 9 3 7.

My dear Mr. Hoey:

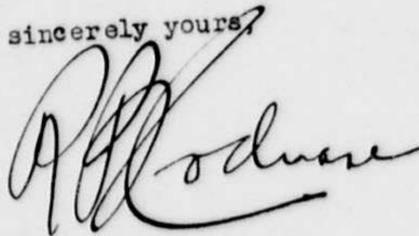
Re: Alberni Residential  
School

Your letter of February 22nd, addressed to Dr. Dorey, was duly received. We will look forward to having you send us a full report of the fire at Alberni when it comes to hand from your Agent there.

Dr. Dorey expects to be in Ottawa on his way to the Maritime Provinces on Tuesday next, and will hope to have the opportunity of discussing with you personally the future of the Indian educational work of the United Church on the West coast of Vancouver Island. If there is any special hour at which it would be most convenient for you to see Dr. Dorey, we would be glad if you would let us know.

Believe me,

Very sincerely yours,



REC.MLT

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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159-1-5



DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
CANADA



IN YOUR REPLY REFER TO  
No. 15/15/48136.  
ALSO TO DATE OF THIS LETTER

*Schools*

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE  
P. O. BOX 666

VICTORIA, B.C., February 25, 1937.

*d*

Dear Sir:

I beg to refer to my letter of yesterday's date, No. 15/15/48129, and to enclose herewith a further letter and report from Capt. G.H. Barry, Inspector of Indian Schools, B.C., with regard to the fire at the Alberni Indian Residential School, West Coast Agency, B.C.

Your obedient servant,

*C. C. Perry*

C. C. Perry,  
For D. M. MacKay,  
Indian Commissioner for B.C.

Encl  
AC

The Secretary,  
Department of Indian Affairs,  
Ottawa, Ont.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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CONFIDENTIAL

Indian Agent's Office,  
Port Alberni, B.C.

February 23, 1937. 5 P.M.

Major D. M. MacKay,  
Indian Commissioner,  
P.O.Box 666,  
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Major MacKay:-

I am forwarding herewith my report on the destruction by fire of the Alberni Indian Residential School, West Coast Agency. This report should be read in connection with the Preliminary Report forwarded to you by the last mail.

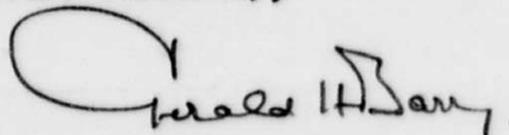
A copy of this letter and report is being sent to you in care of the Indian Agent, Vancouver, in the hope that it may arrive there before you leave for Prince George.

I shall remain in Port Alberni for two or three days to render to Mr. Indian Ashbridge any further help in my power. It is possible that you may wish me to investigate some point further, and this will be done on receipt of telegraphed instructions.

The whole question of the disposal of the farm animals is being left to the Indian Affairs Branch as this is not a question which the Branch wishes me to deal with. No doubt the Indian Agent will be given suitable instructions.

May I in conclusion again urge that no new Indian Residential School be authorized at Alberni. I believe that Mr. Indian Agent Ashbridge will be in perfect agreement with me in this matter should you consult him with regard to the best interests of the Indian children. In any case I do not believe that the Reverend Mr Pitts should be permitted to again become Principal of an Indian Residential School.

Yours sincerely,



Gerald H. Barry.  
Inspector of Indian Schools, B.C.

GHB/



Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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INSPECTORS REPORT ON THE DESTRUCTION BY FIRE OF THE  
ALBERNI INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL.

United Church. West Coast Agency.



Date of investigation: February 23, 1937.

Visit to School Property: Accompanied by Mr. Indian Agent Ashbridge I visited the Alberni Indian Residential School property this morning. Several members of the staff of the school were questioned to clear up points for this report. The answers of some of the staff were most unsatisfactory to me. It was fairly clear that some of the lady members of the staff were attempting to hide something which had occurred in the school kitchen on the morning of February 21st last.

Preliminary Report: The subject matter of my Preliminary Report forwarded to the Indian Commissioner, Victoria this morning would appear to be correct in broad outline. Corrections of minor points are made in the body of this subsequent report, which should of course be read in continuation of the former.

Discovery of Fire: Miss Audrey Mills, teacher of the Senior Division, was in her room on the second story. She heard, she states, a roar above her, and opening her door to see what was the matter saw smoke coming from the attic. Miss How was not present as previously reported. Miss Mills broke the fire disc alarm, but as no one appeared for some time she went down stairs and there met the Principal, Mr Pitts, to whom she reported that the attic was on fire. She then returned to her room to finish dressing. The actual time of the alarm was 7.45 A.M. and not 8 A.M. as previously reported.

Result of Fire Alarm: This was in my opinion highly unsatisfactory, in that the children did not AT ONCE leave the building. They waited for orders from a badly disorganized staff. The girls were handed blankets by members of the staff who had obtained these from the lower dormitories. The boys did not get blankets, and I still am unable to find that they were properly looked after. The first that I can discover of the boys is that they were playing around the school. It was the Principal who made his way into one of the boys' dormitories and threw out some blankets through the window. not

GERTI BOB, a sister of the deceased, but a near relative of Mary Bob of Duncan, was in bed in the Junior Girls' Dormitory and three or four older girls were in the Senior Girls' Dormitory. These children were told to get up and dress by Mrs Sainsbury one of the staff on the girls' side of the school. Why they did not get up when they heard the fire alarm is a question for the Principal to answer. When a Fire Alarm sounds the children should obey in an automatic manner and certainly not wait for orders, sensible or foolish, from a staff that may have become disorganized. In the case of PRACTICE ALARMS children in bed ill should be first warned that there is to be a Drill and that they are to remain in bed.

The other matter in my Preliminary Report under this heading is correct in outline, except that Mr Pitts locked the door of the attic after he had first seen that it was on fire. Mrs Pitts also unlocked this door she states.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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Attic in which Fire Started:

The ventilation flue from the kitchen had openings covered with gratings on each floor. It does not appear likely that any of the children placed burning paper in this ventilation pipe.

The canopy over the kitchen stove or range led through a pipe some fifteen to twenty feet long to the ventilation shaft.

Actual Fighting of Fire:

There would appear to have been a shortage of water from the Alberni City mains due to causes that the school had no control of, and the pressure does not appear to have been maintained in the fire hose.

In any case the fire had too big a start when the Alberni City Fire Department arrived on the scene.

Action of Staff and Pupils during the Fire:

In addition to what has been reported under this heading and in partial correction of former statements, I may say that the GIRLS when taken from the burning building were housed in the Primary Classroom under the care of the two junior teachers, Miss K. Pitts, and Miss How.

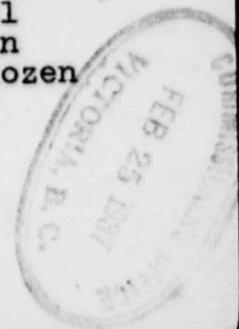
The point of just how the blankets were distributed has been cleared up as described above.

In all some six Singer Sewing Machines were saved. Much of the Principal's furniture and that from Staff rooms was saved. Some of the children's clothes from the laundry were saved also. The teachers lost nearly everything. The teachers I may say in passing were the only members of the staff that could give me a reasonable account of what did happen. They would have appeared to keep their heads better during the fire than the missionary members of the staff, and they certainly were far more straightforward in their answers to my questions to-day.

Buildings Saved: The following buildings are standing:-  
Primary Schoolroom  
Cottage near Primary Schoolroom  
Farm Instructor's Cottage  
Big Barn  
Old Barn  
Garage  
Woodshed with wood  
Implement shed

Action taken by Indian Agent: Mr Indian Agent Ashbridge is, I understanding, forwarding his own report on the fire by this mail. He has now arranged for the disposal of the remaining children on the school property. These are for the most part being sent home. Mr. Indian Agent Graham has been communicated with in regard to the children going to the Cowichan Agency.

Any special cases, that is children from poor homes, are being dealt with under authority of a telegram from the Indian Affairs Branch, and several of these special children will be sent to Ahousaht Indian Residential School where there is plenty of room for a dozen or more.



Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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Cause of Fire:

Though the discipline at this school has been very weak for years, and the control of the children unsatisfactory, I am quite satisfied that the present fire was not incendiary.

It appears that the regular cook, Miss McKinnon is away ill in Vancouver. Mrs Froates is acting as cook. This lady was not in the kitchen on the Sunday morning of the fire, and was in fact in bed.

The kitchen fire was started by Mr. Shaw, Farm Instructor. I am told that big fires are set to cook cereal for breakfast. This seems strange but such is my information.

On this particular Sunday morning a Miss J. Davidson was preparing breakfast in the school kitchen.

Her answers to my simple questions with regard to any peculiar circumstances having occurred were more than evasive. She was in fact incoherent, but admitted that sparks had gone up. She was so obviously covering up something that I determined to question another member of the staff.

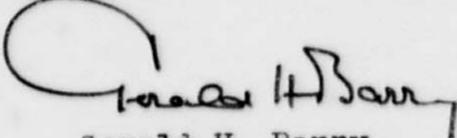
Mrs Sainsbury admitted that there had been an oven fire about half an hour before breakfast. A pan of grease had been left over night in the oven. When the stove became hot and it must have been very hot the grease caught fire and the pan was left on the top of the oven while the above mentioned Miss Davidson went to Mrs. Pitts for advice. Mrs Pitts appears to have put salt on the burning grease.

It has been impossible to get these Missionary Supervisors to tell me plainly what did happen. They are trying to cover up the real facts in my opinion.

I suggest that some paper or cloth soaked in burning grease was drawn up the ventilator shaft and lodged against the light wooden covering of the ventilator system in the attic. The draft up this shaft from a hot kitchen range would be sufficient to draw or suck up a burning cloth. It is possible that a large sheet of newspaper was the item drawn up and not a cloth. It is just possible that the chimney caught fire near the top from the fact that there was too big a fire in the kitchen range, but it is hard to explain how the fire spread in such a case. The possible explanation of the burning cloth or paper in the ventilation system appears to me to be a very simple answer to the question of what caused the fire? I would particularly draw your attention to the actual times, the burning of the grease in the kitchen being some half hour before breakfast and the alarm of fire.

I am of the opinion that some of the Supervisors are attempting to suppress the facts of the occurrence in the kitchen, which seems to me the most likely cause of the subsequent fire, and burning of the school.

Indian Office,  
Port Alberni, B.C.

  
Gerald H. Barry,  
Inspector of Indian Schools, B.C.

159-1-5

H  
D.

March 5, 1937.

Dear Sir,-

As this department erects its own buildings, including Indian Residential Schools, your letter of February 25th, addressed to the Chief Architect of the Department of Public Works has been referred here for attention.

In reply I would say that it is not the intention at the present time to proceed with the rebuilding of the Indian Residential School at Port Alberni.

I might also say that all residential schools are erected from plans prepared in this office.

Yours very truly,



R. Gurney Orr.  
Architect for the Department.

Hubert Savage, Esq.,  
Architect,  
617 Bayward Ave.,  
Victoria, B.C.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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159-1-5  
Department of Public Works, Canada

CHIEF ARCHITECT'S BRANCH

REF.....

OTTAWA, 2nd March 1937

R

*Chief Architect*  
From: Chief Architect,  
Department of Public Works,

To: Indian Affairs Branch,  
Department of Mines & Resources.



Attention Mr. R.G.Orr.

I am enclosing letter which I have received from Mr. Hubert Savage, Architect of Victoria, B.C. with regard to the rebuilding of Indian School at Port Alberni, Vancouver Island, and have advised Mr. Savage that his letter is being referred to your department for the necessary attention.

*C.D. Sutherland*

CGB:C

C.D. Sutherland,  
Chief Architect.

encl.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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**HUBERT SAVAGE**

A.R.I.B.A. M.A.I.B.C.

ARCHITECT

617 SAYWARD BUILDING

VICTORIA, B. C.

25th. Feb: 1937.

C.D. Sutherland Esq.,  
Chief Architect,  
Department of Public Works,  
Ottawa, Canada.



Dear Sir:

I am writing you with reference to the Indian School at Port Alberni, Vancouver Island, which was recently destroyed by fire. I understand that this matter comes under your Department, and if such is the case, I should be pleased to have the opportunity of assisting with the architectural work if it should be decided to rebuild this school.

I have acted as architect to the Saanich Board of School Trustees for several years past, during which time I have carried out several school buildings for them, the most recent one being a High School, costing about \$55,000.00.

Anything you may be able to do for me will be more than appreciated.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hubert Savage".

Hubert Savage.

HS/SS.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
CANADA

1645/37/D.



OFFICE OF  
INDIAN AGENT

159-1-5  
22  
West Coast Agency,  
Port Alberni, B.C.,  
March 3, 1937.



Sir:

I have the honour to report further on the destruction by fire of the Alberni Residential School, on February 21, 1937.

In obedience to the Department's wire of February 22nd, I immediately returned all children to the care of the parents who were able to care for them properly.

Those belonging to Cowichan Agency were sent by train, and met by Mr. Agent Graham.

Seven children, whose home conditions were unfit, were taken by myself, on the Department launch, to Ahousaht Residential School.

All the children are now cared for, and arrangements are under way to provide those who lost their clothing with necessaries, where the parents are unable to provide.

As mentioned in my first report, there remains at the school 33 head of cattle, and 2 horses. These, I understand, were paid for by the Department, and are being cared for, at present, by the school staff. It is requested, please, that I be instructed as to the disposal of the stock.

The Reverend Principal is still retaining his staff, on the assumption that the school will be immediately rebuilt. As this is a matter for the Department to decide, I have refrained from advising him in this matter.

It is felt that the Department should be advised that the Reverend Mr. Pitts is putting every obstacle in the way of transferring pupils to the Ahousaht or other schools, and is holding meetings with local Indians, with the object of inciting them to protest against their being sent to other schools, and to make demands for rebuilding of school at Alberni.

Mr. Caldwell, Principal of Ahousaht School has kindly offered every assistance in caring for, and admitting pupils to his school, where it may be desirable to relieve parents who have too many to properly care for, or for the purpose of continuing their education.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
CANADA

OFFICE OF  
INDIAN AGENT

1645/37/D.

West Coast Agency,  
Port Alberni, B.C.,  
March 3, 1937.

(2)

He has, however, met with nothing but opposition from Mr. Pitts, and it was not thought advisable to take any steps in the matter, except by direction of the Department.

Your obedient servant,

P. B. Ashbridge,  
Indian Agent.

PBA/AM.

The Secretary,  
Indian Affairs Branch,  
Department of Mines and Resources,  
Ottawa.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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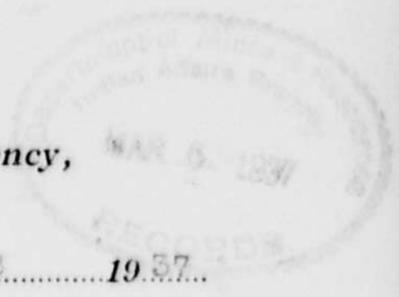
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159-1-5

DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND RESOURCES  
INDIAN AFFAIRS BRANCH

Letter No. 709.C.37

Office of the West Coast Indian Agency,



February 23 1937

Sir,

I enclose herewith Vouchers Nos. 797,  
amounting to \$ 20.00 in favour  
of Alberni Indian Residential School, Alberni, B.C.  
for Allowance towards salary, Night Watchman, for  
month of February 1937.

R

This expenditure was authorized by Departmental  
Letter No. 159-2-5, dated October 7th, 1936.

Your obedient servant,

Indian Agent

The Secretary,  
of Indian Affairs Branch,  
Department of Mines and Resources,  
Ottawa

Form No. 518

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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CANADA

Voucher No.....

# DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

To Alberni Indian Residential School,

Alberni, B.C.

797.

DATE	SERVICE	AMOUNT	
	To Allowance towards salary, Night watchman, at Alberni Indian Residential School, for February 1937.		
	February 1st to 15th @ 40.00 Month	20	00
TRIPPLICATE FOR FILE Voucher in duplicate detached for Accountant to pay.			
Authority Letter No: 159-2-5. October 7th, 1936.			
	TOTAL,	20	00

I HEREBY CERTIFY that this Voucher is correct, that the material has been supplied, the work performed and that the charges are fair and just; also that the expenditure has been incurred legitimately and that each item of the same is a fair and just charge against the Government of Canada.

*[Signature]*  
Agent

FORM No. 506

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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POOR-COP

Ottawa, March 11, 1937.

Reverend Sir:

I desire to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 6th instant and also copy of a report on the destruction, by fire, of the Alberni Indian Residential School, forwarded by you to the church authorities.

I appreciate very fully the courtesy that prompted you to supply us with this information.

I note your request for a copy of the official report made to the Department by Inspector Barry. I may state, in reply, that a copy of the official report, submitted to the Department by Mr. P. B. Ashbridge, was forwarded, a week or so ago, to Dr. Cochrane, Secretary of the Home Mission Board. We have received, from Inspector Barry, a number of letters in which reference is made to the fire at Alberni. I understand, however, that it has not been the practice of the Department to prepare and send out copies of these reports to the officials in charge of our residential schools. If there is any specific information you have in mind, you might communicate with us again.

Yours very sincerely,

R. A. Hoey,  
Supt. of Welfare & Training.

*RAH*

Rev. F. E. Pitts, B.A.,  
Principal,  
Indian Residential School,  
Alberni, B. C.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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Indian Residential School

REV. F. E. PITTS, B.A., PRINCIPAL

Alberni, B. C. March 6, 1937.

Dept. of Indian Affairs,  
Ottawa, Canada.

R

Dear Sirs:

Attached find a copy of my report to the Church offices in Toronto re possible causes of fire in Alberni Residential school.

I send this on to your Department that in discussions about future plans you may have these facts before you.

I would be very pleased to receive from you a copy of the official report to your Department from Inspector Barry, who investigated for the Commissioner at Victoria.

Yours truly,

F. E. Pitts

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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POOR-COPY

Indian Residential School

REV. F. E. PITTS, B.A., PRINCIPAL

*Copy*

Alberni, B. C. Feb. 28, 1937.

Mrs. C. M. Leveys,  
Executive Sec'y, W.M.S. Board,  
United Church, Toronto.

Dear Mrs. Leveys:

Thanks for your prompt telegram expressing sympathy and consideration for us in our great loss of the school. I have delayed the report for a few days that I might the better consider the details.

What we felt was the greatest loss was that after ten years of very close and strenuous work we could not leave it for someone else to carry forward on the foundation we had laid. We had all repairs and work in the best condition we have ever had them and to think that in one month, and that the most strenuous month we have ever had, things could go wrong in so many ways.

We have had the longest winter this country has experienced for a long time--over 9 weeks. On January 15, our kitchen matron was taken seriously sick and Mrs. Pitts had to take charge of the kitchen for nearly a month along with her own work; a few days later one of the senior boys walked in his sleep and jumped from a third story window and very fortunately got off with a compound fracture of one leg. One of the senior girls developed T.B. meningitis, was taken to the hospital and died three weeks ago today; seventy-five children got flu and many of them were seriously sick; two more developed T.B. meningitis, and died in the hospital two weeks ago to-day. That same night a heavy snow storm and rain and wind crushed in the roof of our recreation hall--a big building 38' by 80' and the other out-buildings were dangerously laden with snow. Part of the time the seamstress and laundress were very sick in bed with flu.

We just got all the children up and everything going nicely again, when from no apparent condition other than had been there all along, the school burned down a week ago. This surely seems like a chapter from the book of Job.

I write all this to impress upon you what it means to run an Indian school out in the country with 120 small children and to have the responsibility of every department.

There is always speculation as to the cause of a fire in any Indian school. Captain Barry came to investigate for the Department. He seemed to think that a very likely cause was that some of the children had died and according to old Indian custom some of the children had burned down the building (although they died in the town hospital.)

A second possible cause Captain Barry investigated was that I had called in the Indian agent about a month before to reprimand and advise two boys that who had stolen something and thought that in revenge they had set the fire.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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I wish to state positively that I am as certain as is humanly possible that no child nor Indian had anything to do with it and state also that it was impossible for any of the children or Indians to get where the fire started even if they had wanted to do so.

My own theory of the origin of the fire is that it was due to a faulty construction of the building--a fault that any architect should have seen and if there are any other schools built on this same plan, as I believe a number are, the Indian Department should have a competent man inspect them at once, and the Church should see that they do.

Note: The school was a basement three story building with kitchen dairy, bake shop, dining rooms and playrooms in the basement. The fire started on the top floor on the girls' side of the building in a room approximately 30 x 40 x 10 feet, finished for a dormitory but used to store summer clothing in the winter and winter clothing, bedding, etc. in the summer. It had hardwood floor, fir wainscoting, plastered walls and beaverboard ceiling.

The chimney and ventilating flues ran through this room about 3 feet from the door on the north side of the building. (The chimney of the heating plant and of hot water system did not go through this building).

The chimney was built on concrete foundation and extended through the four floors and peak of the roof, approximately 60 feet high and had four flues. The outside flues were single brick walls with flues about 20" square, with ventilating grates on each floor. The one on the south side took a ventilating pipe from the canopy over the kitchen range. The pipe from the canopy was about 30 feet long and about 15 inches in diameter. The two middle flues of the chimney were smoke flues; the one on the north took the smoke from a small galvanized bake oven. The one on the south took the smoke pipe from the kitchen range. These smoke flues had an 8-inch wall at the sides and a 4-inch wall between the smoke flues and the ventilating flue.

In order to get a better circulation of air through the ventilating shaft a steam radiator of four sections 4 feet high was placed inside this ventilating flue on the top floor on both sides of the chimney. These radiators were heated, of course, from the steam boiler under the laundry building.

When these radiators were put in, an opening in the brick work about 4 feet by 13 inches was left in front of the radiator. The whole chimney, smoke and ventilating flues, was covered with light fir wainscoting and a door of the same material was placed over this opening in the brickwork in front of the radiator. All this woodwork in the room was varnished.

The door to the room was locked with a heavy spring Yale lock and Mrs. Pitts had the one key and I had the other. No one else went into that room unless with us or by use of our keys.

The teacher who discovered the fire was sleeping in Sunday morning while we were at breakfast. She was aroused by a slight explosion that shook the windows and made them rattle and immediately saw the smoke coming through the beaverboard ceiling. Just outside the door of her room was the fire alarm that rang all through the building. Before she was half way down the stairs, I met her and rushed to the door of this room. On opening it, I found the casing of the door on fire all way

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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CANADA

POOR-COPY

round, also the back of the door, just 3 feet from this chimney. The fire hose was on the opposite side of the room 30 feet from the door but any man would have been a fool to have tried to reach it. I closed the door and ran down two floors for the 5-gallon chemical tank. When I returned the farm instructor had the hose from the floor below and we tried both the water and chemicals without effect as the smoke was so dense and strong from the varnish that we were driven out and we phoned for Alberni City fire brigade, also Port Alberni brigade and the Alberni Pacific Lumber Co. and Forestry Department engines; but we could not control the fire and could only save a few things.

I am convinced that the fire was caused either by the heat of the smoke flue setting fire to the fir wainscoting and varnish or if from the ventilating flue it was caused by spontaneous combustion of dust accumulated in this small radiator or a slight explosion of gas that blew open this little door in front of the radiator and set fire to the varnish near it.

I am sure the smoke flue was not burning out, for there was a little iron trap door at the bottom of this flue and I was past this door four times within half an hour before the fire occurred and could have heard and smelled it if the chimney had been burning out.

Had this fire occurred at night nothing could have prevented panic and no training in fire drill would have prevented loss of life. Had it occurred a week earlier, we had seventy five children in bed with flu.

I have written this to warn all concerned to prevent a similar occurrence in any other school.

All our equipment and help worked like clock work but still we were helpless ~~our~~ our good fortune was that it happened when it did while we were in the basement.

Yours sincerely,

*W. E. Pitts*

*Principal*

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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(C O P Y)

Division: "A"  
District: West Coast  
Detachment: Alberni

BRITISH COLUMBIA  
POLICE

File No.

Date: 24-2-37.

PR or PCR.

UNORGANIZED TERRITORY.

ALBERNI DISTRICT.

R E P O R T.

Re:- INDIAN MISSION SCHOOL. Destroyed by Fire.

I beg to report that a 8.00 A.M. Sunday February 21st 1937 a fire alarm was turned in from the Indian Mission and Residential School situated at the Sheshaht Indian reservation, Alberni B.C.

Upon my arrival all the children were out of the building and I proceeded to the attic of the girls dormitory where the fire started. Owing to the intense heat a through check of the attic could not be made but it was noticed that the fire had started at the chimney or ventilator.

The chimney is a large affair with four flues. The two outer flues being ventilators and the center flues chimney flues. The outer walls of the chimney were built of two layers of brick with a single layer of brick between the chimneys and ventilators. Over the large kitchen range was a canopy connected to one of these ventilators by a fifteen inch pipe for the purpose of taking fumes from the cooking out of the kitchen.

It is my opinion that the fire was caused by a defective chimney when either excessive heat or flame from the chimney flue penetrated the ventilator igniting the grease which would have accumulated in the ventilator from the kitchen range, the fire escaping from the ventilator by the way of a wooden door opening into the attic from the ventilator.

During the morning of the fire and about fifteen minutes before the fire in the attic was noticed, there was a large fire in the kitchen range and fat was being rendered down in the oven. This fat became ignited but was noticed and extinguished. In my mind this had nothing to do with the fire, as the flame from the fat in the oven would not have reached as high as the ventilator.

The building was a wooden frame building on a stone foundation owned by the Department of Indian Affairs and valued at \$80000.00 was a total loss. the contents of the building owned by the United Church of Canada was valued at 10000.00. Loss estimated at \$8000.00 at present I have not been able to ascertain if insurance was carried by the United Church. Personal property belonging to Mr. Frank Edwin Pitts, Principal, was valued at \$1600.00 was insured for \$800.00 by the Queen Insurance Company of America. Policy #184927, Part of Mr. Pitts's belongings were saved.

The fire was attended both by the Alberni City Fire Department also the Port Alberni brigade. But lack of water pressure and hampered by heavy mesh screening on the windows little could be done to save the building.

Witnesses who can testify. Mr. Frank Edwin Pitts, Miss Audrey Mills, school teacher.

Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 6433, File 877-5, part 5)

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